

Sunday Message

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

THE WORD

Year A • 12 March 2023 • Psalter Week 3



In today's Gospel, Jesus meets an unaccompanied Samaritan woman in Samaria. Everyone knows that Jews and Samaritans don't associate with one another. Unmarried men and women don't associate with one another either, at least not unsupervised.

Jesus is tired from travelling and needs a drink. The Samaritan woman comes to the well at the hottest time of the day so as not to be bothered by anyone else. She has a checkered past, to say the least.

Jesus does the unthinkable. He speaks to her. He is aware of her past but doesn't let it get in the way. He looks at her and sees the good in her. He doesn't see her as different or unworthy, or inferior.

He asks her to give him a drink. She replies, "How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?" She is astonished that he would speak to her, of all people.

Then they start to talk about religion, and Jesus reveals himself as the Messiah. Rather than dismiss his claim, the woman returns to her people to tell them about Jesus. She bears witness to Jesus. This outcast of a woman brings people to faith. She becomes a true disciple.

All because Jesus treated her with love and respect. Just like he treated every woman and man he encountered. ■

REFLECT

A lot has changed since the time of Jesus, yet a lot has remained the same. During Jesus' time, women were seen as second-class citizens, defined chiefly through their roles of wife or mother. In a male-dominated society, they lacked rights and were seen as the property of their father or husband. Though there were always exceptions, a woman's place was in the home.

This was the worldview Jesus was born into. It's also one that he challenged. Remember the group of men who were ready to stone the woman caught in adultery? Speaking against the sexual double standard of the day, Jesus told those without sin to cast the first stone.

Jesus recognised the dignity of women and allowed them to join his band of disciples. Think of Mary of Magdala. Going against the practice of her time, which said that only men could be disciples, Mary became a follower of Jesus, accompanying him during his ministry. When Jesus' closest male disciples hid for fear of their lives during his passion and death, she stuck with him.

Even more significant, Mary was the first person to witness the resurrected Christ. It wasn't Peter or John or any of the male disciples that Jesus appeared to. It was Mary of Magdala. It's why she's called the "Apostle to the Apostles".

Jesus' treatment of the woman in today's Gospel offers lessons for us, as individuals, as a society, and as a church, about how we treat women, about how we treat each other.

First, as individuals. Do I treat those closest to me with profound love and respect? I am a priest, a bachelor in my 60s, living in a house full of men, but I'm lucky in that both my parents lived into deep old age. And I could see how my father related to my mother, and my mother related to my father – as equal partners, soul mates, utterly dependent on each other. My mother once complained that my father had "gone to the bad" hugging her. Every time he passed her by, she said, he hugged her – a beautiful statement of love, affection, respect.

We know that domestic violence is a problem and that many people, especially women, are caught in controlling, violent

DO

Look at your life. Where do you turn to find the nourishment that is truly refreshing and life-giving?

How effective an apostle are you? How eagerly do you tell people the Good News about Jesus?

SAY

"Lord, you alone can satisfy my deepest thirst. Help me to seek all that I need in you. Amen."

PRAY

Today's Gospel is a story of how a woman and her townspeople come to faith. Think about the gift of faith which you have received. Pray for a deepening of your faith.

LEARN

Water is a central image of today's Gospel. It teaches us that Jesus is the living water that leads us to eternal life

God's gift of faith is given to us to be shared

relationships, made worse by the Covid-19 lockdown. As individuals and families, how do we treat those closest to us?

As a society, greater equality exists between the sexes than in the past, but much remains to be done. The glass ceiling remains. Women continue to be objectified sexually, and internet porn has made it worse, doing tremendous damage to how young boys see women and how young women see themselves. What do we need to do to create a society where women feel safe and equal?

As a church, it is clear that much needs to be done to advance the role of women. Women comprise more than half the Church's members, yet they have little say in decision-making. Imagine our Church's new life and authority if women had a full and equal voice. It is one of the major issues the upcoming Synod in Rome will consider.

Jesus was extraordinarily ahead of his time. He showed, by his actions and words, that he respected and valued women, that he respected and valued everyone. So also must we. ■

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

When I prove my holiness among you,
I will gather you from all the foreign lands;
and I will pour clean water upon you
and cleanse you from all your impurities,
and I will give you a new spirit, says the Lord.

COLLECT

O God, author of every mercy and of all goodness,
who in fasting, prayer and almsgiving
have shown us a remedy for sin,
look graciously on this confession of our
lowliness,
that we, who are bowed down by our
conscience,
may always be lifted up by your mercy.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of
the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

FIRST READING

Exodus 17:3-7

A reading from the book of Exodus.

Tormented by thirst, the people complained against Moses. "Why did you bring us out of Egypt?" they said. "Was it so that I should die of thirst, my children too, and my cattle?" Moses appealed to the Lord. "How am I to deal with this people?" he said. "A little more and they will stone me!" The Lord said to Moses, "Take with you some of the elders of Israel and move on to the forefront of the people; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the river, and go. I shall be standing before you there on the rock, at Horeb. You must strike the rock, and water will flow from it for the people to drink." This is what Moses did, in the sight of the elders of Israel. The place was named Massah and Meribah because of the grumbling of the sons of Israel and because they put the Lord to the test by saying, "Is the Lord with us, or not?"

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

PSALM

Psalm 94

Response:

**O that today you would listen to his voice:
"Harden not your hearts."**

- 1 Come, ring out our joy to the Lord;
hail the rock who saves us.
Let us come before him, giving thanks,
with songs let us hail the Lord. (R.)
- 2 Come in: let us bow and bend low;
let us kneel before the God who made us
for he is our God and we
the people who belong to his pasture,
the flock that is led by his hand. (R.)
- 3 O that today you would listen to his voice!
"Harden not your hearts as at Meribah,
as on that day at Massah in the desert
when your fathers put me to the test;
when they tried me, though they saw my
work." (R.)

SECOND READING

Romans 5:1-2, 5-8

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Romans.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ by faith we
are judged righteous and at peace with God,

since it is by faith and through Jesus that we
have entered this state of grace in which we
can boast about looking forward to God's
glory. This hope is not deceptive, because the
love of God has been poured into our hearts
by the Holy Spirit which has been given us.
We were still helpless when at his appointed
moment Christ died for sinful men. It is not
easy to die even for a good man – though
of course for someone really worthy, a man
might be prepared to die – but what proves
that God loves us is that Christ died for us
while we were still sinners.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

**Glory to you, O Christ, you are the Word of
God!**

**Lord, you are really the saviour of the world;
give me the living water, so that I may never
get thirsty.**

**Glory to you, O Christ, you are the Word of
God!**

GOSPEL

John 4:5-15, 19-26, 39-42

(a longer version may be read: John 4:5-42)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John.

Jesus came to the Samaritan town called Sychar, near the land that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well is there and Jesus, tired by the journey, sat straight down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." His disciples had gone into the town to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, "What? You are a Jew and you ask me, a Samaritan, for a drink?" – Jews, in fact, do not associate with Samaritans. Jesus replied:

"If you only knew what God is offering
and who it is that is saying to you:
Give me a drink,
you would have been the one to ask,
and he would have given you living water."

"You have no bucket, sir," she answered "and the well is deep: how could you get this living water? Are you a greater man than our father Jacob who gave us this well and drank from it himself with his sons and his cattle?" Jesus replied:

"Whoever drinks this water
will get thirsty again;
but anyone who drinks the water that I shall
give
will never be thirsty again:
the water that I shall give
will turn into a spring inside him, welling up
to eternal life."

"Sir," said the woman "give me some of that water, so that I may never get thirsty and never have to come here again to draw water. I see you are a prophet, sir. Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, while you say that Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship." Jesus said:

"Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know; for salvation comes from the Jews.

But the hour will come – in fact it is here already – when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth: that is the kind of worshipper the Father wants. God is spirit, and those who worship must worship in spirit and truth."

The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah – that is, Christ – is coming; and when he comes he will tell us everything." "I who am speaking to you," said Jesus, "I am he."

Many Samaritans of that town had believed in him on the strength of the woman's testimony, so, when the Samaritans came up to him, they begged him to stay with them. He stayed for two days, and when he spoke to them many more came to believe; and they said to the woman, "Now we no longer believe because of what you told us; we have heard him ourselves and we know that he really is the saviour of the world."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

**I believe in God,
the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
(all bow during the next two lines)
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried;
he descended into hell;
on the third day he rose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of God the
Father almighty;
from there he will come to judge the living
and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting. Amen.**

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

Be pleased, O Lord, with these sacrificial offerings,
and grant that we who beseech pardon for our own sins,
may take care to forgive our neighbour.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

**For anyone who drinks it, says the Lord,
the water I shall give will become in him
a spring welling up to eternal life.**

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

As we receive the pledge
of things yet hidden in heaven
and are nourished while still on earth
with the Bread that comes from on high,
we humbly entreat you, O Lord,
that what is being brought about in us in
mystery
may come to true completion.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

